GAO

June 2000

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Services Need to Assess Efforts to Meet Recruiting Goals and Cut Attrition

20000626 041

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Accountability ★ Integrity ★ Reliability

Contents

Abbreviations

DOD   Department of Defense

G A O

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

B-285028

June 23, 2000

The Honorable Tim Hutchinson
Chairman
The Honorable Max Cleland
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Department of Defense (DOD) faces a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining the hundreds of thousands of new recruits it enlists each year. The last 2 years, in particular, have been difficult for the military services as they have struggled to meet their recruiting goals. This difficulty, which some believe represents a recruiting crisis, makes the services' problems with first-term attrition rates even more critical. The early separation of new recruits is costly in that the services' recruiting and training investment in each enlistee averages almost $38,000. In response to the request of the former Chairman and the current Ranking Member, we assessed (1) the services' responses to recent recruiting shortfalls and (2) the services' efforts to reduce their historically high attrition rates for first-term enlistees.

Results in Brief

To address mounting problems in recruiting sufficient numbers of qualified enlisted personnel, three services—the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force—have increased their numbers of recruiters and their advertising budgets and have offered larger enlistment bonuses and more money for college. These tools have been shown by past research to help the services attract new recruits. The services have also sought innovative ways of expanding their recruiting market without reducing the quality of recruits, for example, by targeting persons attending community colleges and persons without high school degrees who meet other quality standards. Because so little time has passed since the services have begun to respond to their recent recruiting problems, they cannot yet assess the long-term success of their efforts. Also, the services do not yet know which of their new recruiting initiatives work best. For example, the Navy does not know the extent to which each of the changes it has made to its recruiting program—increasing its number of recruiters, its advertising budget, or its enlistment bonuses—contributed toward meeting its goal in fiscal year 1999 and

whether that strategy will work in the future. Finally, while each of the services might point to localized successes, such as the Army's ability to channel young people into hard-to-fill jobs by offering large enlistment bonuses, DOD does not know the extent to which the services might be competing with each other for the same potential recruits. Until sufficient time has passed and each of the services consistently meets its goal, DOD cannot be assured that individual service strategies will collectively enable DOD to meet its overall recruiting requirements.

In addition to improving the screening of applicants before they enlist, the services have also begun many efforts to reduce the attrition of first-term enlistees while they are in training and after they have been assigned to their first duty stations. These efforts include providing extra attention to recruits struggling during basic training and disciplining and working with enlistees who have completed training and are experiencing minor behavioral problems. These actions appear promising as they target recruits who might previously have been summarily discharged. Nonetheless, the latest attrition data available indicate that first-term attrition has reached all-time highs for DOD enlistees. The attrition rate for enlistees entering the services in the mid- to late 1980s hovered between 30 and 34 percent, and this rate gradually rose in the 1990s from a low of 33 percent to a peak of nearly 37 percent for enlistees entering the services in fiscal years 1994 and 1995. Greater success in reducing attrition may not yet be apparent because the services have just begun many of their efforts, or the continued high rate of attrition may indicate that without these efforts, the services' losses would be even higher. The services, however, are not developing tools needed to measure the long-term success of their efforts, thus limiting their ability to judge the effectiveness of those efforts in reducing attrition.

Because DOD does not have the tools at present to determine whether the services' recruiting and retention efforts will be successful in the long term, we are recommending that DOD and the services (1) assess the relative success and cost-effectiveness of their recruiting strategies in meeting DOD's overall needs by applying one service's best practices to the other services whenever possible and by minimizing cross-service competition and (2) put in place tools for measuring the long-term success of the services' attempts to reduce attrition by confirming that the services' short-term remedial efforts are not simply delaying attrition to later points in enlistees' first terms. In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with our recommendations and cited steps it plans to take to implement them.

Background

Until fiscal year 1998, the services had been successful in meeting their recruiting goals for the all-volunteer force of enlistees. In fiscal year 1998, the Navy and the Army were the first services to miss their annual recruiting goals for active-duty enlisted personnel. That year, the Navy achieved 88 percent of its goal and the Army 99 percent. The following year, the Army made only 92 percent of its goal and the Air Force made 95 percent of its objective. (See table 1.) For some Members of Congress, the fact that the services were missing their recruiting goals indicated a recruiting crisis. Added to the services' recent struggles to meet recruiting goals is the fact that, historically, about one-third of their enlistees do not complete their first terms of service.

Table 1: Services' Success in Meeting Their Annual Recruiting Goals for New Active-Duty Enlistees

Service	Fiscal year 1997			Fiscal year 1998			Fiscal year 1999		
	Goal	Actual	Percentage of goal	Goal	Actual	Percentage of goal	Goal	Actual	Percentage of goal
Army	82,000	82,088	100	72,550	71,752	99	74,500	68,209	92
Navy	50,135	50,135	100	55,321	48,429	88	52,524	52,595	100
Marine Corps	34,512	34,548	100	34,267	34,284	100	33,668	33,703	100
Air Force	30,310	30,310	100	30,194	31,685	105	34,400	32,673	95

Source: DOD.

Military Services Are Taking Steps to Address Recruiting Problems

In trying to reduce or eliminate recruiting shortfalls as quickly as possible, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force have increased their number of recruiters, advertising budgets, and enlistment bonuses. Because the Marine Corps has successfully met its recruiting goals, it does not plan to initiate any major changes to its recruiting program in these areas. While the individual services may be able to trace an increase in numbers recruited to increases in recruiting resources, they have as yet been unable to determine which of their separate efforts are most effective. For example, they are not sure whether it is more effective, with limited resources, to increase enlistment bonuses, numbers of recruiters, or advertising. Without a history of what works with today's recruits, the services must experiment with and document how well precise amounts of benefits and bonuses result in the maximum attraction and retention of enlistees. Finally, the services are at present unable to determine the extent to which their individual efforts are resulting in greater competition among

themselves and thereby unnecessarily increasing the overall cost of recruiting to DOD.

Army Recruiting Initiatives

In response to missing recruiting goals for the past 2 years, the Army has been putting additional resources into areas that historically have proven to result in greater numbers of recruits. It has not yet, however, had time to fully analyze whether what has worked in the past is currently working or is likely to work in the future. From fiscal year 1993 through 1998, the Army increased its number of recruiters from 4,368 to 6,331 and increased its advertising expenditures from $34.3 million in fiscal year 1993 to $112.9 million in fiscal year 1999 (in fiscal year 2000 constant dollars). The Army has also offered an array of enlistment bonuses to qualified personnel and increased the maximum amount offered from $12,000 to $20,000. Enlistment bonus expenditures increased substantially in just the past year, from $59.7 million in fiscal year 1998 to $105.2 million in fiscal year 1999. Figure 1 illustrates increases in the Army's advertising and enlistment bonus expenditures for fiscal years 1993-99.

Figure 1: The Army's Expenditures for Advertising and Enlistment Bonuses (fiscal year 2000 constant dollars in millions)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Advertising	$34.3	$45.2	$57.4	$72.1	$97.0	$97.8	$112.9
Enlistment bonuses	$12.3	$8.1	$13.6	$19.0	$49.6	$59.7	$105.2
Number of recruits	77,563	68,039	62,929	73,418	82,088	71,752	68,209
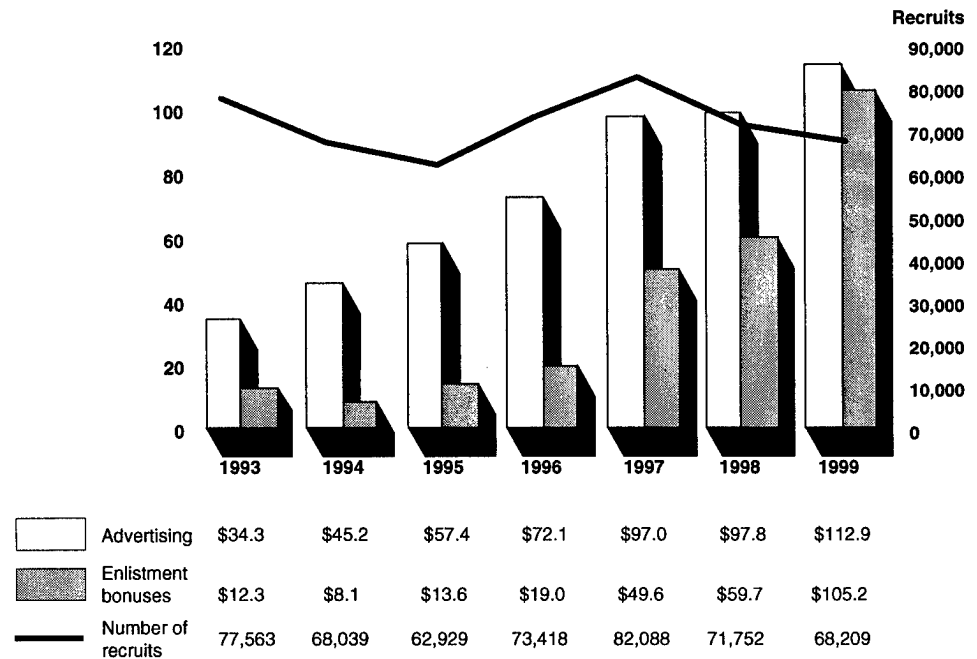
Source: DOD.

The Army has also recently announced new ways to expand its recruiting market to persons it would not have sought out in the past. For example, through its General Educational Development Plus program, the Army intends to target youth who do not have high school diplomas but who have higher-than-average aptitude scores and no histories of disciplinary problems. It also plans to focus attention on youth who are college-bound. The College First Program, for example, proposes to pay enlistees attending college $150 per month for up to 2 years after they have signed a contract to enlist but before they actually do so.

In an effort to more directly compete with private sector pay and benefits, the Army is developing the Partnership for Youth Success Program. Under this proposed program, the Army would obtain guarantees from private sector companies that they would have jobs waiting for specially trained enlisted personnel who successfully complete their tours. The companies would benefit by obtaining highly skilled personnel, and the former Army personnel would benefit by being assured a secure job, using their skills

upon their departure from the Army. While this program could have a very beneficial effect on attracting quality recruits, it could also have an adverse effect on retention if enlistees are provided incentives to separate from the military.

Navy Recruiting Initiatives

Navy Recruiting Command officials noted several factors that they believe enabled them to meet their recruiting goal in fiscal year 1999. They were unable, however, to say precisely which of these factors worked or how well. For example, the Navy increased its number of recruiters from 3,342 in fiscal year 1998 to 4,725 in fiscal year 1999. Simultaneously, it opened recruiting jobs to lower ranked, but "hard-charging," enlisted personnel. Also, the Navy substantially increased its advertising expenditures—from $37.8 million in fiscal year 1997 to $67.3 million in fiscal year 1999. Finally, the Navy enhanced its bonus offerings to enlistees. For example, it awarded special bonuses of $3,000 to enlistees who agreed to enter basic training between February and May, a time when the Navy is traditionally hard-pressed to fill their slots. Figure 2 illustrates the Navy's expenditures for advertising and enlistment bonuses for fiscal years 1993-99.

Figure 2: The Navy's Expenditures for Advertising and Enlistment Bonuses (fiscal year 2000 constant dollars in millions)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Advertising	$13.9	$33.6	$39.4	$42.3	$37.8	$63.8	$67.3
Enlistment bonuses	$14.7	$11.2	$6.3	$7.9	$15.1	$19.8	$45.2
Number of recruits	63,073	53,982	48,637	48,206	50,135	48,429	52,595
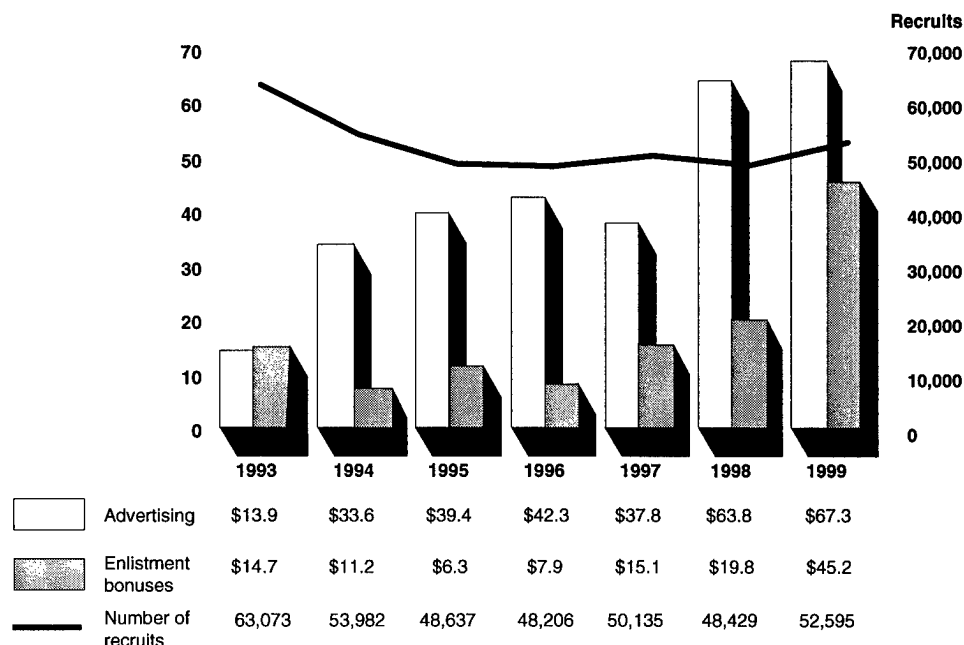
Source: DOD.

While increasing the amounts of resources spent on recruiting, the Navy also began to seek ways to expand its recruiting market. For example, it began to target persons who have prior military service and persons without high school diplomas who scored high on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, were at least 19 years old, had a minimum of three character references, and had proof of stable employment. The Navy is also targeting college-bound recruits under three separate programs. Under the first program—the Navy College Assistance Student Headstart Program—selected recruits in the nuclear and submarine fields are placed on active duty while they are in college, receive entry-level pay for up to 1 year, and then attend basic training. In the second program, called Technical Preparation Partnerships, the Navy coordinates with community colleges to allow recruits to earn their associates' degrees while they are serving their first enlistment terms. A third program, the Navy College Program, allows Navy servicemembers to receive college credit for Navy-provided training.

Air Force Recruiting Initiatives

Air Force recruiting officials told us that a false sense of security contributed to their inability to meet fiscal year 1999 recruiting goals. Because the Air Force had easily met its goals in the past, Air Force officials did not believe that such recruiting investments were necessary. Fiscal year 1999's recruiting results indicated that the pool of new recruits the Air Force had historically counted on would not always be readily available. To increase the chance of future success, the Air Force has already begun to purchase television advertising, offer enlistment bonuses to new recruits, and increase the number of Air Force recruiters. Because the Air Force will be changing its recruiting methods in the future, it has not yet had time to collect historical data on which recruiting techniques work most successfully.
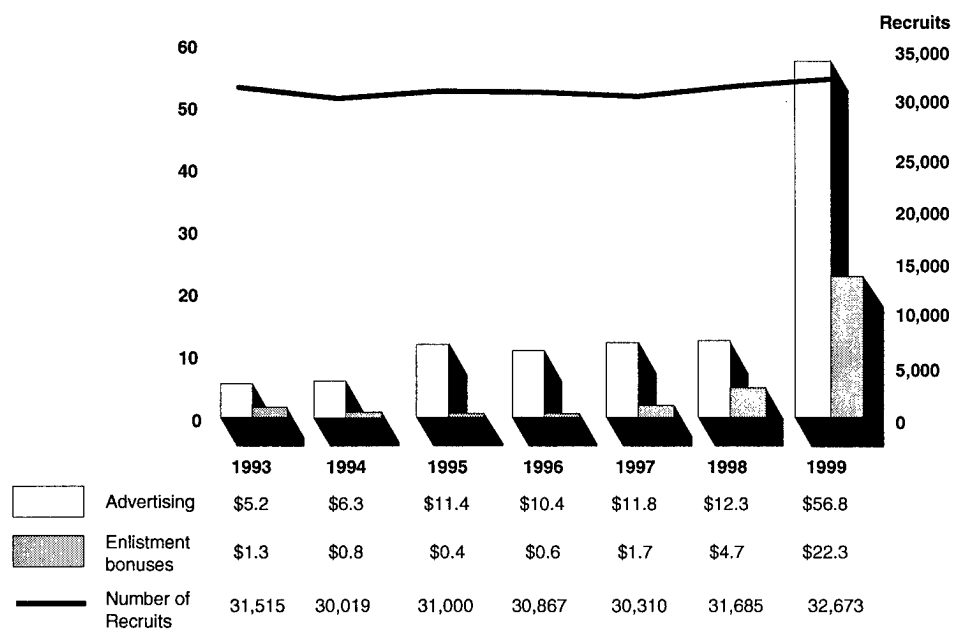
Because Air Force recruiters have historically signed up about two times more recruits than recruiters in other services while working fewer hours, the Air Force has not needed to assign as many persons to recruiting duty as the other services have. For example, in fiscal year 1999, the Marine Corps employed 2,650 recruiters to recruit 33,685 new active-duty Marines, while the Air Force employed only 950 recruiters to recruit 32,068 enlistees. Banking on continued high productivity in fiscal year 1999, the Air Force did not staff its field recruiting force to its authorized level of 1,209. That is, even while the number of required annual enlistments increased and the Air Force said it became more difficult to recruit, the Air Force not only did not increase the number of its recruiters but allowed the number to fall below authorized levels. For fiscal year 2000, the Air Force plans to increase its number of actual recruiters to 1,446.

Prior to fiscal year 1999, the Air Force also maintained a minimal advertising budget and had not requested money for paid advertising on commercial television. In that year, for the first time, the Air Force requested and received funding for television advertisements. The Air Force increased expenditures for all advertising from approximately $12.3 million in fiscal year 1998 to $56.8 million in fiscal year 1999.

In October 1998, the Air Force expanded its enlistment bonus program to target persons willing to commit to 6- rather than 4-year contracts in critical and highly technical skills, such as combat controllers, pararescue

personnel,[1] linguists, and security forces. The Air Force believed that offering such bonuses (1) positioned it for a better return on its recruiting and training investment, (2) provided another tool to attract youth into the Air Force, and (3) would result in improved retention over time and ultimately in a reduction in future requirements for new recruits without prior military service. Enlistees in approximately 100 occupations are eligible for bonuses ranging from $2,000 to $12,000. Combat controllers and pararescue personnel are eligible for the maximum bonus of $12,000. Figure 3 illustrates the Air Force's increased expenditures for advertising and enlistment bonuses for fiscal years 1993-99.

Figure 3: The Air Force's Expenditures for Advertising and Enlistment Bonuses (fiscal year 2000 constant dollars in millions)

		1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
	Advertising	$5.2	$6.3	$11.4	$10.4	$11.8	$12.3	$56.8
	Enlistment bonuses	$1.3	$0.8	$0.4	$0.6	$1.7	$4.7	$22.3
	Number of Recruits	31,515	30,019	31,000	30,867	30,310	31,685	32,673

Source: DOD.

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[1] Pararescue personnel are responsible for search, rescue, and recovery operations. They provide rapid response in adverse geographic and environmental conditions on land or water, including emergency and field medical care.

Finally, to address recruiting and retention issues, the Air Force formed a Recruiting and Retention Task Force on March 1, 2000. Led by a brigadier general, the task force reports to the Under Secretary of the Air Force and the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The purpose of the task force is to serve as the single point of contact for the integration, consolidation, and coordination of over 120 recruiting and 89 retention initiatives.
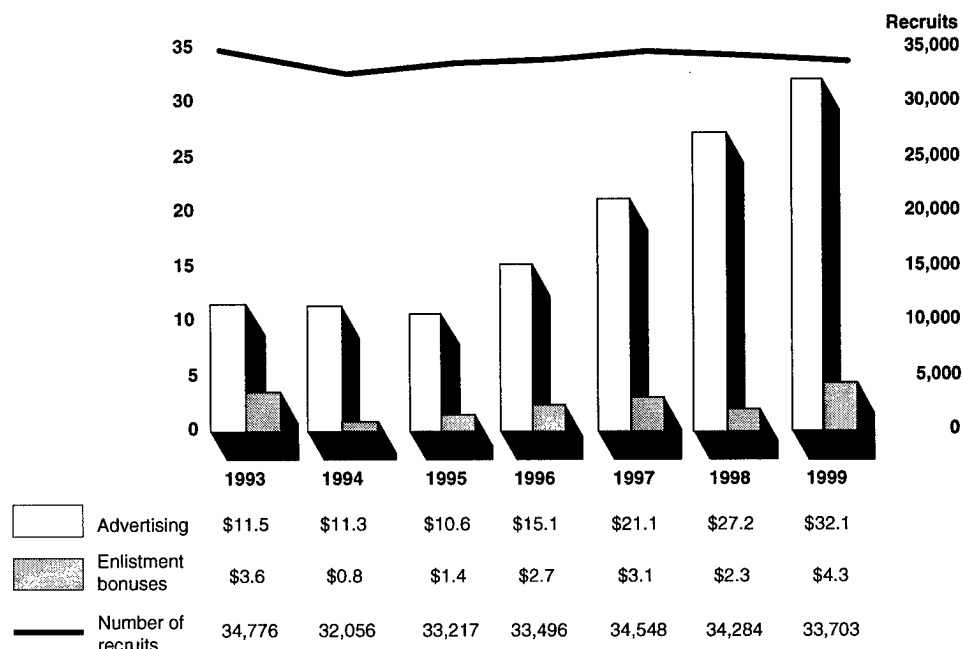
Marine Corps Recruiting Initiatives

The Marine Corps is the only service that has successfully met its recruiting goals each year. Consequently, it does not plan to initiate major changes in its recruiting strategy. Over the years, the Marine Corps has slowly but steadily increased its recruiting workforce and advertising budget. Recruiting officials believe they have been able to meet their goals because the Marine Corps has a consistent and recognizable identity that appeals to youth; because it has an institutional, financial, and resource commitment to supporting recruiting services; and because its recruiters work extremely hard. Data from the Defense Manpower Data Center's 1998 survey of recruiters indicate that the Marine Corps' recruiting success comes at a price. Marine Corps recruiters work longer hours and take less leave than recruiters in any other service.

The Marine Corps does not see itself in competition with the private sector to the same extent that the other services do. As such, it is institutionally against attempting to attract recruits with bonuses, changing its entry-level requirements, or increasing the number of recruiters. However, in order to maintain a "level playing field" with the other services, the Corps did increase its advertising expenditures substantially in fiscal year 1999 and nearly doubled its funding for enlistment bonuses in the same year. Figure 4 illustrates the Marine Corps' expenditures for advertising and enlistment bonuses for fiscal years 1993-99.

Figure 4: The Marine Corps' Expenditures for Advertising and Enlistment Bonuses (fiscal year 2000 constant dollars in millions)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Advertising	$11.5	$11.3	$10.6	$15.1	$21.1	$27.2	$32.1
Enlistment bonuses	$3.6	$0.8	$1.4	$2.7	$3.1	$2.3	$4.3
Number of recruits	34,776	32,056	33,217	33,496	34,548	34,284	33,703

Source: DOD.

Services Have Not Fully Evaluated What Recruiting Approaches Work Best and How to Minimize Cross-Service Competition

Despite years of research on how best to recruit into the military, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force are unsure of what recruiting strategies will work best in today's environment. Their concerns are that private sector competition, the economy, the attitudes and skills of youth, and the views of their parents toward the military have so changed over time that old ways of doing things may no longer be applicable. DOD and the services cannot yet determine whether they are taking the appropriate steps to increase the number of young people they enlist without reducing the chances that these persons will perform acceptably and complete their enlistment tours. A DOD study released in March 2000 suggests that the Army and the Navy should consider recruiting between 85 and 90 percent high school diploma graduates, as opposed to the previous 90-percent benchmark. DOD believes that recruiting in this range should allow the services to adjust better to extraordinarily tight recruiting markets. However, DOD is not yet able to assess the long-term effect of the services' attempts to recruit persons outside of their traditional markets or to bring

in a somewhat lower percentage of high school diploma graduates. Lastly, DOD and the services have been unable to determine how the services' individual methods of increasing the number of recruits they enlist affect competition among themselves.

DOD and the services are undertaking many efforts to improve their knowledge of the recruiting market and of recruiting methods. For example, a recently completed study for DOD by a contractor pointed out how DOD could reduce redundancies in the ways the services purchase marketing information and how it could improve the way the services market themselves to those who influence youth. Two other studies are in final stages: a RAND study that will provide a foundation for better determining advertising strategies using national and local media and a Navy College Fund study that will analyze the effects of differing enlistment incentives on the enlistment of high quality recruits. DOD has also begun many initiatives to reengineer recruiting. For example, it plans to create an on-line recruiting station, increase military internet traffic, take advantage of state-of-the-art civilian telemarketing business practices, and test the feasibility of processing applicants in areas closer to an applicant's home.

These initiatives and studies appear promising in opening up new avenues for military recruiting. Two important areas, however, need further work: determining the most cost-effective mix of recruiting resources and analyzing the extent to which the services are competing with each other when they increase their numbers of recruiters or the amounts spent on enlistment bonuses and college incentives. In regard to the first area, DOD believes that such a study would be of value and plans to update a model that it hopes will form the basis for making wise decisions about how to best use recruiting resources in today's economy. The existing model relates the quantity of recruits, recruit quality, and total recruiting costs and identifies potential tradeoffs among them. It does not, however, address the relative effectiveness of alternative uses of recruiting dollars for such things as additional recruiters, advertising, and enlistment bonuses. In the second area, DOD states that it has not completed an in-depth analysis of whether the services are competing with each other when they increase the number of recruiters or the amounts spent on incentives. Currently, DOD has no evidence to confirm or disprove whether increases in recruiters and enlistment incentives have resulted in increased numbers of recruits for DOD as a whole.

Such analyses of the effectiveness of the services' actions in meeting DOD's overall recruiting needs would enable DOD and the services to develop fact-based policies on how best to spend their recruiting resources and to minimize interservice competition. These types of analyses are also in keeping with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-62, Aug. 3, 1993), which was designed to create a new results-oriented federal management and decision-making approach that requires agencies to set goals, measure performance, and report on their accomplishments. DOD's Performance Plan for Fiscal Year 2000 includes a performance goal to "recruit, retain, and develop personnel to maintain a highly skilled and motivated force capable of meeting tomorrow's challenges." The plan includes two related performance measures: number of recruits enlisted and enlisted retention rates. The plan also includes the percentage of "quality" recruits as a related performance indicator.[2]

One example of a new program needing evaluation is the Army's experiment with bringing on board a small number of motivated and intelligent high school dropouts in an attempt to enlarge the recruiting market. Before this time, the Army was reluctant to enlist persons without high school diplomas because they have historically had a higher attrition rate. Army officials noted that it will take about 3 years to determine whether these recruits will perform at acceptable levels so that decisions about enlarging and maintaining the program can be made. The Army has planned for such an evaluation to be conducted by a contractor.

Similarly, the impact of higher enlistment bonuses remains in question. While higher enlistment bonuses may result in short-term successes in enlisting persons into hard-to-fill jobs, neither the services nor DOD planned to conduct studies to determine what the optimal amounts of such monetary incentives should be or whether such bonuses primarily resulted in competition among the services for the same limited number of recruits. At present, no research exists to help the services determine how much these bonuses should be. Recent decisions on how much to offer in bonuses have in some cases been based on one service's attempt to remain competitive with another. For example, Navy officials told us that they felt compelled to "play catch-up" with the Army after the Army increased its bonuses to $20,000 for some occupations. On the other hand, an Army official believed that the Army had lost its traditional "market share" of

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[2] See GAO/GGD/AIMD-99-215 and GAO/NSIAD-99-178R for our assessment of DOD's performance plan.

recruits to the Navy this year. Specifically, he believed that the Navy's increased number of recruiters were taking away persons who would otherwise have joined the Army. In other words, these services see evidence that success for one service often comes at the expense of another. Service officials believe that at least to some extent, they are simply shifting their "market shares" of a fixed number of new recruits. While Army officials believe that they can determine how much the services are "expanding the market" and how much they are simply competing for a fixed number of recruits, we found no evidence that the services or DOD are systematically tracking the extent to which such shifting of market shares is resulting in unnecessarily increased recruiting costs.

Another enlistment program—offering bonuses to recruits who enter the service in certain hard-to-recruit months—could have an undesired negative side effect. Both the Army and the Navy are offering incentives for recruits to sign up and immediately begin training, even though the Navy believes that recruits who spend time in the Delayed Entry Program are better motivated and have better chances to succeed than those who immediately enter active duty. For this reason, while these new programs may help the Navy to meet immediate enlistment goals or the Army to fill costly training seats, they may not be cost-effective in the long term if those who would have dropped out during the Delayed Entry Program are now dropping out in basic training. In fact, Navy basic training officials cited shorter time spent in the Delayed Entry Program as a major reason that basic training attrition has risen. Army officials disagreed, arguing that there is little evidence that time spent in the Delayed Entry Program has any relation to attrition rates. Army officials believe that it is more cost-effective to fill costly training slots and to take the chance that recruits will drop out during training than it is to allow the training slots to remain unfilled.

Recently, efforts have intensified to bring together all services and the private sector to discuss what needs to be done to address recruiting needs in the 21st century. In a September 1999 symposium, top DOD military and civilian officials concluded that the lack of a strategic, long-term perspective hampers the development of effective recruiting programs and that more accurate information is needed to better allocate resources. Officials noted that better research was needed to help determine whether their current approaches were cost-effective and whether current enlistment quality standards remain valid.

Services Are Taking Steps to Reduce First-Term Attrition Rates

The services are taking steps to reduce first-term attrition. Initiatives are being taken to improve the screening of applicants before they enlist, to provide extra attention to new recruits struggling during basic training, and to discipline and retain enlistees who complete training and experience minor behavioral problems. Many of the services' attrition-reduction actions are being taken in response to recommendations we have made in previous reports on this issue. These recommendations have included ways DOD and the services could tie their recruiter incentive systems more closely to their recruits' graduation rates from basic training, ways they could more thoroughly screen out military applicants who have disqualifying medical or criminal histories, and ways they could target and retain some first-term enlistees who simply need remedial attention.[3] Many of the services' efforts to reduce first-term attrition appear promising. However, the most recently available data for all the services indicate that attrition rates for persons entering the services in fiscal years 1994 and 1995 and being separated by the end of fiscal years 1998 and 1999 were at historically high levels.[4] Since many of the services' initiatives were introduced after these groups of enlistees had completed training, they could not be expected to have much impact on the attrition rate for these groups. For initiatives that were introduced before fiscal year 1994, attrition rates might have risen even higher without them.

Positive Effects of Services' Initiatives Are Not Yet Reflected in Attrition Rates

Our analysis of service-wide attrition data from the Defense Manpower Data Center on enlistees who entered the services in fiscal years 1994 and 1995, the two most recent year groups for whom a full 4 years of data is available, indicates that service efforts initiated before these years to reduce training attrition had not yet been successful. Service actions initiated to reduce training attrition after those years would not be reflected in these groups' rates. In fact, the rate of attrition at the 48-month

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[3] See appendix I for a detailed listing of our prior recommendations and DOD's response to them.

[4] The most recent group of enlistees we could track DOD-wide 48 months after they had enlisted was the group who entered in fiscal year 1995. For example, to track enlistees who entered the services in fiscal year 1996, we would have to track them until 48 months later, or the end of fiscal year 2000. At the time we did our data analysis, complete data on fiscal year 2000 was unavailable.

point for these enlistees has risen.[5] As shown in table 2, over the last 11 years, the DOD-wide attrition rate has varied from a low of 29.6 percent for enlistees who entered the services in fiscal year 1985 to an all-time high of 36.9 percent for those who entered in fiscal year 1994. For enlistees entering the services in fiscal year 1995 and separating early before the end of fiscal year 1999, DOD's overall rate remained high, at 36.8 percent. The rates for the Marine Corps and the Air Force remained virtually the same in fiscal years 1994 and 1995; the rate declined by around 1 percentage point, and the Navy's rate increased by 1.7 percentage points. The Marine Corps' rate peaked for enlistees entering the service in fiscal year 1990.

During the past 6 years, only the Marine Corps has begun to lower its attrition rate. Its rate for enlistees entering in fiscal year 1995 was almost the same as it was for enlistees entering in fiscal year 1985, while the rates of the other services remain 7-9 percentage points above their 1985 level. (See table 2.) Marine Corps officials attributed their success in reducing attrition to a change in philosophy from weeding recruits out quickly to taking more time to help them meet Marine Corps standards.

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[5] We measure the attrition rate 48 months after enlistees enter the service because this captures the early separation of the majority of enlistees, who have 2-, 3-, and 4-year contract terms. Measuring the rate at 48 months also captures the early separation of persons with 5- or 6-year contracts during their first 4 years of service.

Table 2: DOD Attrition Rates for Active-Duty Enlistees

Numbers in percentages

Fiscal year of enlistment	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	DOD-wide
1985	30.5	30.6	33.7	24.6	29.6
1986	31.3	33.8	35.4	26.3	31.4
1987	31.4	31.5	33.0	25.3	30.5
1988	33.7	31.6	30.4	25.5	31.3
1989	35.3	34.0	32.7	30.1	33.7
1990	36.4	32.6	36.2	30.4	34.2
1991	36.8	30.5	34.2	31.7	33.6
1992	35.9	32.2	32.2	30.0	33.2
1993	39.3	35.8	31.5	32.5	35.8
1994	40.1	37.8	33.2	32.7	36.9
1995	39.0	39.6	33.2	31.9	36.8

Source: Our analysis of Defense Manpower Data Center data.

A Large Portion of Attrition Occurs During Enlistees' Time in Training

A significant portion of first-term attrition occurs during enlistees' first 6 months of service, when most enlistees are in basic or follow-on training. After the first 6 months of service, early separations decline. This pattern holds true for all four services. Figure 5 shows the timing of premature separations for enlistees who entered the services in fiscal year 1995.
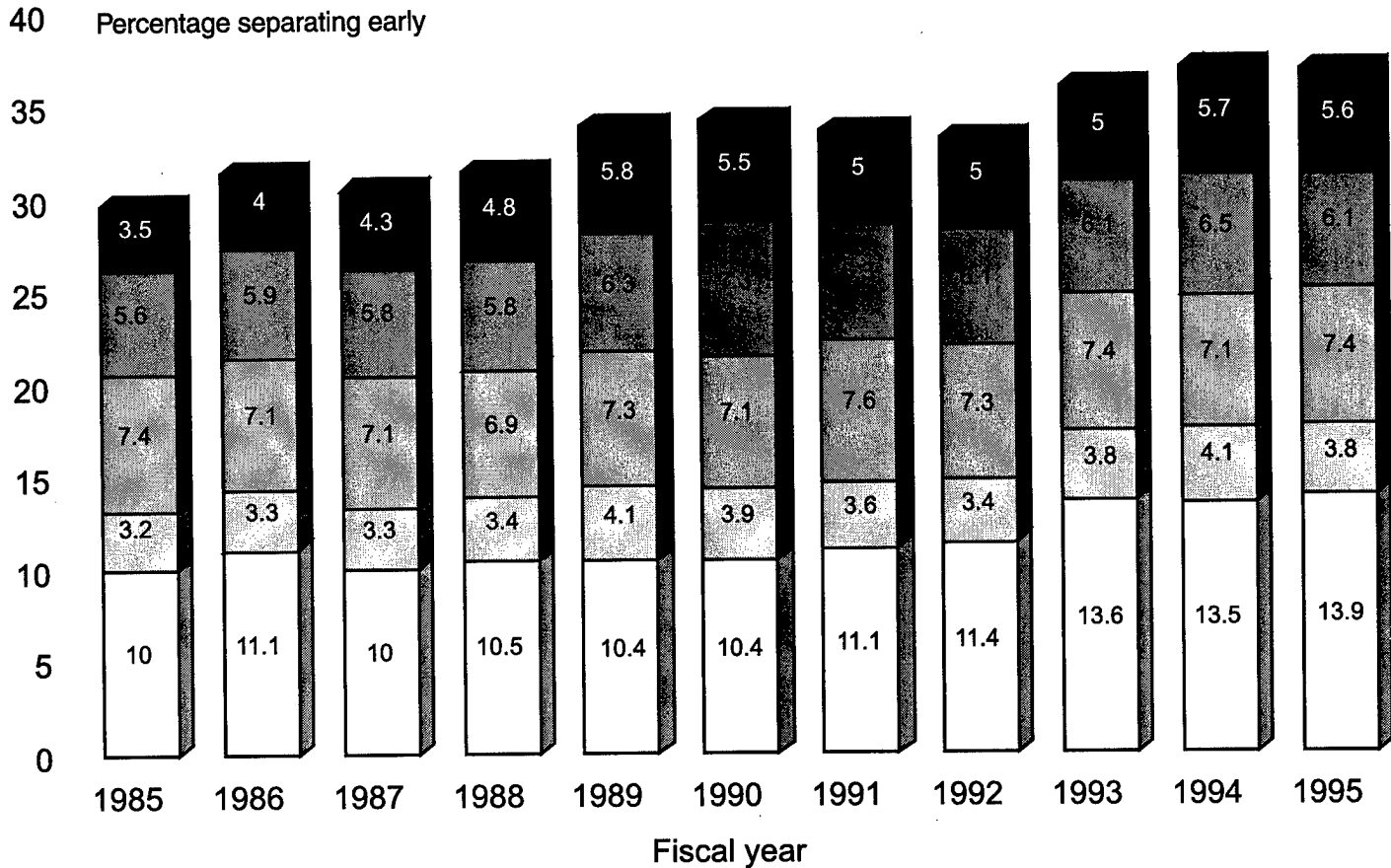
Figure 5: Percentage of Fiscal Year 1995 Enlistees Separating During Particular Periods of Their First Terms

■ 0-6 months ▨ 7-12 months ▦ 13-24 months ☐ 25-36 months ☐ 37-48 months
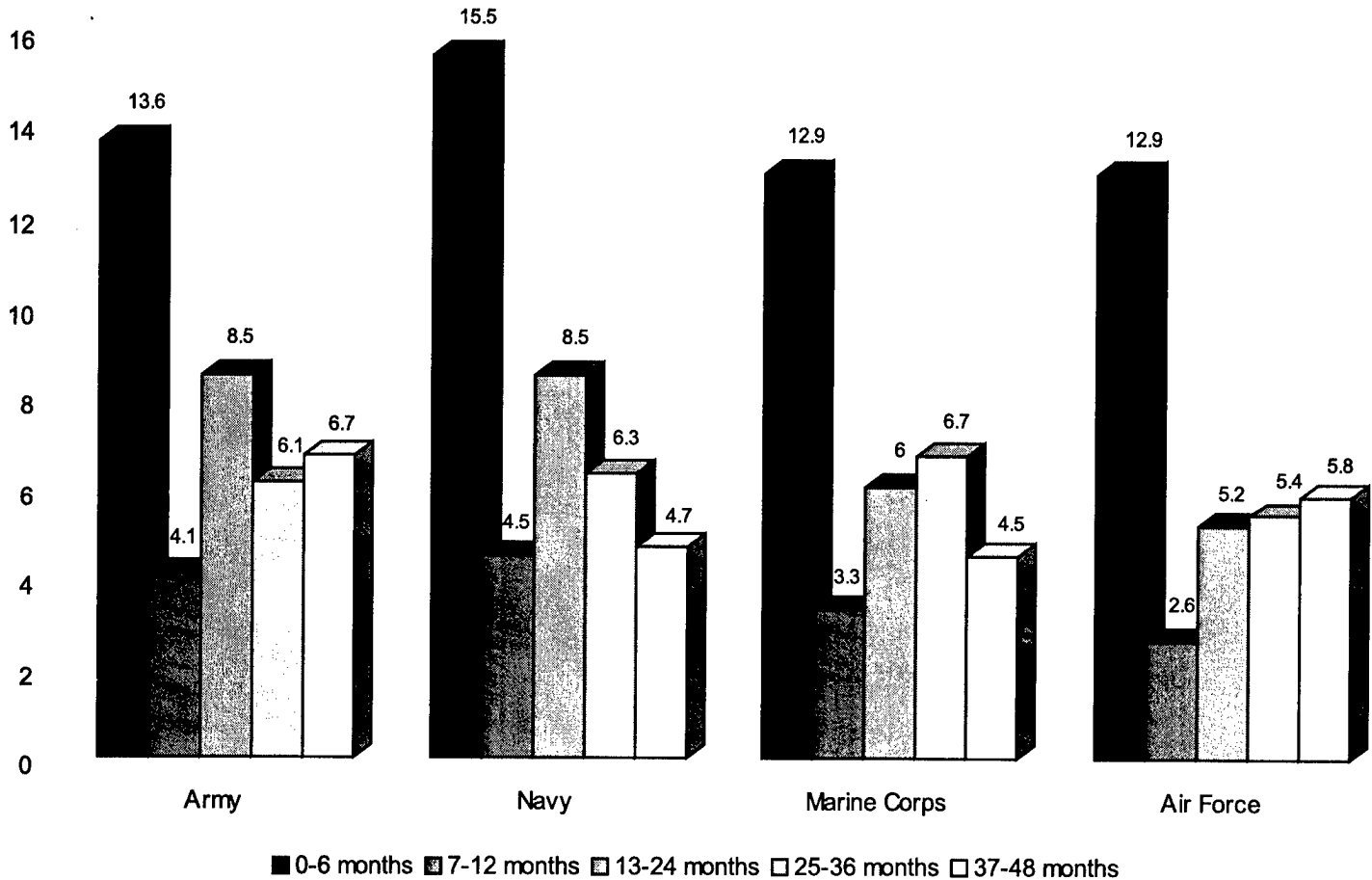
Source: Our analysis of Defense Manpower Data Center data.

From fiscal year 1985 through fiscal year 1995, as overall enlisted attrition has risen, the percentage of attrition occurring in the first 6 months of service has risen more quickly than it has during later intervals of service (see fig. 6). For this reason, the services have focused many of their initiatives to reduce attrition on activities that occur in an enlistee's first 6 months.

Figure 6: Trends in the Timing of First-Term Enlisted Attrition

40 Percentage separating early

Fiscal year	0-6 months	7-12 months	13-24 months	25-36 months	37-48 months
1985	10	3.2	7.4	5.6	3.5
1986	11.1	3.3	7.1	5.9	4
1987	10	3.3	7.1	5.6	4.3
1988	10.5	3.4	6.9	5.8	4.8
1989	10.4	4.1	7.3	6.3	5.8
1990	10.4	3.9	7.1		5.5
1991	11.1	3.6	7.6		5
1992	11.4	3.4	7.3		5
1993	13.6	3.8	7.4	6.1	5
1994	13.5	4.1	7.1	6.5	5.7
1995	13.9	3.8	7.4	6.1	5.6

☐ 0-6 months ▨ 7-12 months ☐ 13-24 months ▨ 25-36 months ■ 37-48 months

Source: Our analysis of Defense Manpower Data Center data.

Causes of Early Separations During Training

Service-wide attrition data from the Defense Manpower Data Center indicate that enlistees who leave the military in their first 6 months are separated for three general reasons: (1) medical/physical problems, that is, medical conditions that existed prior to service or physical problems that developed while enlistees were in training; (2) erroneous or fraudulent enlistment, indicating either that the services did not detect military

applicants' disqualifying conditions prior to their enlistments or that the applicants deliberately withheld disqualifying information from the services; and (3) performance problems, such as failure to pass the physical training test, loss of motivation, or inability to adapt to military life. The remaining separations at the 6-month point are for various other reasons, none of which is particularly predominant.

These reasons include misconduct, excessive weight or body fat, character and behavior disorders, alcoholism, drug use, and homosexuality. (See fig. 7.)

Figure 7: Primary Reasons That Enlistees Who Entered the Services in Fiscal Year 1998 Were Separated in Their First 6 Months of Service
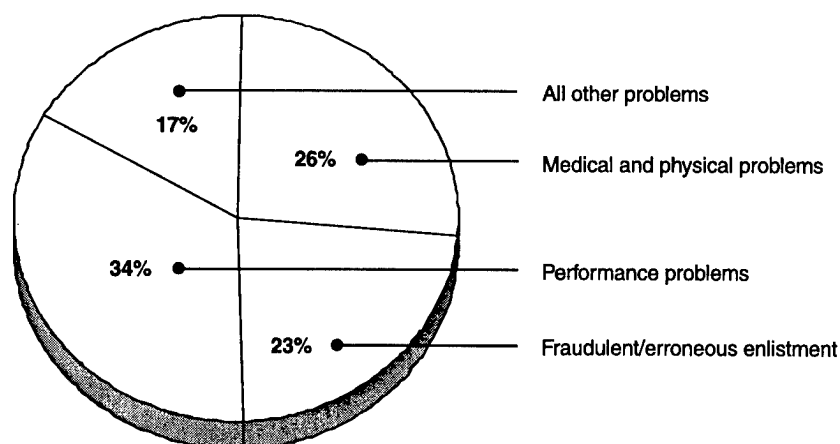
Notes:

Performance problems include such behaviors as failure to pass physical training tests, losing motivation, or inability to adapt to military life.

Medical and physical problems include conditions that were not detected when enlistees were physically examined before they entered the service, conditions that developed while enlistees were in the service, or injuries that enlistees suffer while in the military.

Fraudulent enlistment is the entry into service of someone who knowingly concealed information that would have disqualified him or her from military service. Erroneous enlistment is the entry into service of someone who had a disqualifying condition that was not discovered beforehand and was not deliberately concealed at the time of enlistment. Separations for fraudulent or erroneous enlistment apply to discoveries of disqualifying conditions covering all military service requirements, for example, maximum number of allowable dependents, drug use, medical problems, psychological problems, or criminal histories.

Source: Our analysis of Defense Manpower Data Center data.

Programs to Reduce Separations for Performance Problems

Service-wide data from the Defense Manpower Data Center indicate that about 34 percent of all separations during training are for performance problems. Officials at the Army, the Navy, and the Marine Corps training bases we visited believe that attrition because of performance problems can be reduced and have instituted remedial programs to provide extra attention to recruits struggling with behavioral, physical training, or academic problems. While the Army and the Marine Corps report that they have recently been able to reduce attrition during training, the most recently available data from the Defense Manpower Data Center does not yet confirm this. Defense Manpower Data Center data indicate that attrition rates remained high for all the services' enlistees during their first 6 months of service. For enlistees who entered the services in fiscal year 1998, 15.8 percent of all Army enlistees were separated before they had served 6 months; 16.2 percent of all Navy enlistees; 17.5 percent of all Marine Corps enlistees; and 12.1 percent of all Air Force enlistees.

Table 3 describes the remedial training programs that target groups of enlistees for retention at the Army's basic training site at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Training officials reported that in fiscal year 1999, they placed 7,612 enlistees in these programs, or 22 percent of the 34,265 recruits who were trained at Fort Jackson that year. Of those who entered remedial programs, 68 percent successfully completed their programs and were returned to regular basic training units.

Table 3: Remedial Programs Offered at Fort Jackson's Basic Training Site

Program	Description
Think It Over	Remedial attention paid to recruits who have second thoughts about basic training in the first week after they have arrived
English as a Second Language	A 4-day language skills program designed to help recruits whose primary language is not English
Fitness Training Unit	A required remedial physical fitness training course for all recruits who fail the physical fitness test given on the second day of basic training
Prepare to Train	A remedial academic program for those whose scores on the DOD entrance aptitude test suggest that they might have difficulty in the academic portion of training
Retraining/Holding Unit, "See It Through"	A program for recruits who have performance and behavioral problems during their first through final weeks of basic training
Physical Training and Rehabilitation Program	A mandatory program to help injured enlistees remain physically fit, heal properly, and quickly return to training
Physical Training Course	A 3-week remedial physical training course for enlistees who fail the Army Physical Fitness Test required for graduation

Three of these programs are offered at all Army basic training sites: the Fitness Training Unit, the Retraining/Holding Unit, and the Physical Training and Rehabilitation Program. Army officials believe that such programs have resulted in reduced attrition in the first 6 months of service. Army data indicate that 6-month attrition peaked in fiscal year 1998 at 17.8 percent and then dropped to 14.6 percent in fiscal year 1999 and 14.3 percent in fiscal year 2000.

When Navy basic training attrition rates grew steadily from fiscal years 1996 through 1999—from 13.2 to 18.3 percent—the Navy became concerned about how to retain more recruits. Navy officials believe that attrition rates would have gone even higher in fiscal year 1999 if they did not have three remedial programs: the Personal Applied Skills Streaming Program, which helped 861 recruits to address anger, motivational, and behavioral problems; the Fundamental Applied Skills Training Program, which provided instruction for 1,526 recruits struggling with academic

problems; and PT-O, a program that helped 1,555 recruits address physical training problems. Before these programs were implemented, recruits struggling for these reasons might have been separated. While these programs appear promising, Navy officials have not collected data on how many enlistees who were enrolled in these remedial programs ultimately completed their first tours of duty. Therefore, the Navy cannot determine whether such programs were only delaying rather than preventing early separations.

Data maintained by the Marine Corps indicate that it has had some success in reducing attrition during basic training. For example, the Marine Corps reports that attrition at Parris Island, South Carolina, dropped from 17.8 percent in fiscal year 1998 to around 12.1 percent in fiscal year 1999. Training officials attributed this drop almost entirely to a change in training philosophy that involves working with troubled recruits rather than discharging them. Training officials stressed that such a change does not reduce quality or graduation requirements.

In keeping with the Marine Corps' change in philosophy, training officials instituted new or reinforced ongoing programs to reduce attrition. These programs include a week-long remedial program to help recruits pass their marksmanship qualification and a physical conditioning program for enlistees who fail their initial physical fitness test. Marine Corps training officials said that 81 percent of all male recruits and 90 percent of all female recruits who were sent to the physical conditioning program were returned to training. Officials did not have information on the attrition rates of persons who completed their first tours of duty after they successfully graduated from Parris Island's remedial programs.

Steps to Reduce Fraudulent and Erroneous Enlistments

Recruits can be separated for fraudulent enlistment if they knowingly conceal information that would disqualify them from military service. Such a discharge can result from concealing the number of one's dependents, from lying about prior drug use, or from failing to report a prior medically or criminally disqualifying condition. Recruits can be separated for erroneous enlistment if their disqualifying conditions are discovered after they enter the military, though this type of separation has also been used to discharge Navy enlistees who test positive on the drug tests at basic training.

To reduce the numbers of fraudulent and erroneous enlistments involving medical and psychiatric histories, the services have attempted to improve

the gathering of prior medical histories of military applicants. To reduce the number of enlistments involving the concealment of criminal backgrounds, DOD and the services have taken actions to improve the criminal screening process. For example, the Military Entrance Processing Command, which is the organization responsible for operating the 65 stations located throughout the country where recruits receive their entry screening, has obtained funding from the services to purchase fingerprint machines that will allow the services to more efficiently conduct background searches before military applicants enter the service.

Steps to Reduce Early Separations for Medical and Physical Reasons

To reduce premature separations for medical and physical reasons, DOD and the services have taken actions to improve the medical screening of enlistees before they enlist. For example, DOD has adopted a recommendation we made in our report on attrition during training to revise the medical form used to gather historical medical information on applicants for military service in order to gather more precise medical information on conditions that often result in early separations.[6] Also in response to a recommendation we made in that report, DOD now requires military applicants to list their medical providers and insurers so that applicants will be more forthcoming in reporting their past medical histories. Ultimately, the Military Entrance Processing Command hopes to add medical screening tests, such as tests for asthma, at its processing stations to help screen out enlistees with medical conditions known to be high attrition risks.

Officials at training bases for all four services cited attempts to reduce early separations for enlistees who suffer physical injuries.

- At Fort Jackson, Army training officials determined that providing athletic shoes designed to properly fit each recruit would reduce the risk of injury for all trainees. While Fort Jackson officials believe that better athletic shoes have resulted in fewer trainee injuries, these officials have not collected data to verify this assumption.
- Navy basic training officials have also taken several actions to reduce injury-related separations by redesigning their training program. This redesign has included rewriting the physical conditioning schedule, including how often recruits are required to run and march, and

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[6] See *Military Attrition: DOD Could Save Millions by Better Screening Enlisted Personnel* (GAO/NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997).

retraining drill instructors to emphasize the importance of keeping to a regimented routine to reduce stress fractures and other injuries. Data maintained by the Navy indicate that these efforts resulted in a reduction in the number of severe stress fractures. Specifically, Navy data indicate that the number of severe stress fractures peaked at almost 3.5 per thousand recruits in fiscal year 1998 but was reduced in fiscal year 1999 to about 0.5 per thousand.

- After a spike in attrition in the first quarter of 1998, Parris Island's training officials introduced initiatives to reduce training-related injuries, such as a Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Therapy Clinic to rehabilitate rather than separate recruits who suffer injuries and to expedite their return to training. Marine Corps training officials noted that attrition due to lower extremity problems fell by 10 percent during the first 6 months after the Sports Medicine Clinic was opened.

- The Air Force began to change its basic training regimen after a spike in the attrition of persons suffering injuries in 1995. In that year, training officials began to alternate enlistees' wearing of boots and athletic shoes, and in 1997, they added a central physical therapy clinic closer to where trainees were located. In January 1999, a new sports medicine specialist began to emphasize the importance of rehabilitating rather than separating enlistees who suffered injuries. Because of this new approach to treating injured enlistees, as well as other initiatives, the Air Force reports that the number of separations for medical reasons, including injuries, was reduced by half from fiscal year 1998 to fiscal year 1999.

Causes of Early Separations After Training

Separations for enlistees who have completed training, that is, between their 7th and 48th months of service, have less to do with screening and more to do with performance and discipline. For example, 32.4 percent of enlistees who entered the services in fiscal year 1995 and separated after serving at least 6 months were separated for misconduct; 15 percent for medical or physical problems; 9.7 percent for drug use; 8.3 percent for performance problems; and 7.1 percent for character or behavior disorders.

Service Efforts to Reduce Attrition After Training

The services have initiated a number of programs to reduce the attrition of enlistees who have completed training. Like their programs to reduce attrition from basic training, however, most of these efforts are too new to demonstrate their long-term effects. Examples include the following:

- The Air Force has created First Term Airman Centers at all bases. The centers bring together all first-term airmen immediately upon arrival at their new bases for indoctrination and mandatory training. These classes last from 10 days to nearly 1 month.
- The Navy is developing a retraining program that is nonpunitive in nature and targeted at sailors lacking good life skills, such as sound decision-making, effective goal-setting, and good financial management.
- The Army has begun to rehabilitate and retain or punish enlistees previously separated as deserters.
- For a 1-year test period beginning in November 1999, the Army changed the probationary status of first-term enlistees who had completed training. Enlistees whose training is completed before their first 180 days of service are no longer treated as on probation; commanders may no longer separate these persons using an expedited discharge process. The intent of this program is to compel commanders to consider rehabilitation rather than separation for enlistees in this category.

Imprecise Data on the Causes of DOD Attrition

The only available DOD-wide data on enlisted separations are not very useful in specifying why enlistees are leaving early.[7] As we reported in 1997, the codes used to categorize separations are vague, more than one code can be chosen to classify the same separation, and the services use these codes differently. As a result, we recommended that the Secretary of Defense issue implementing guidance for DOD's separation codes to provide a reliable database for DOD to manage attrition and for the services to set appropriate targets for reducing it. While DOD formed a working group in April 1998 to improve the separation codes, it has not yet issued its final set of codes or its accompanying guidance. It was therefore too soon for us to assess whether the new codes and guidance would correct problems we reported earlier. DOD has also established long-term efforts to collect more precise information on the medical reasons enlistees are being separated early. Collecting such data will enable DOD and the services—at some point in the future—to make fact-based decisions on which medical conditions result in greater or lesser attrition risks.

DOD and the services also plan to collect survey information from enlistees on why they are separating from the military. As required by the National

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[7] See *Military Attrition: DOD Could Save Millions by Better Screening Enlisted Personnel* (GAO/NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997).

Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000,[8] DOD plans to administer a survey on the attitudes toward service of individuals separating from the military. This survey will be given to all personnel leaving the service or transferring to the reserves during the 6-month period between April and September 2000. The Defense Manpower Data Center has been tasked with developing and analyzing the survey results.

Also, all four services have begun or will shortly begin to collect information on their enlistees' perceptions of quality of life through entry and exit surveys.

Services Do Not Yet Have Information on Long-Term Effects of Their Attrition-Reducing Efforts

While all the services appear to have begun initiatives that will help them either to reduce first-term attrition or to prevent it from rising further, the effect of these initiatives will not be known until enlistees have had a chance to serve their entire contract terms after these initiatives have been in place. For example, to measure the effectiveness of initiatives begun in fiscal year 1999, it will be necessary to track enlistees who entered that year until 48 months later, in fiscal year 2003. While, in some cases, the services have mechanisms in place to track the success of remediation programs in boot camp, we did not see that the services had the tools necessary to track the long-term success of individuals who had successfully completed these programs. In other words, the services did not know what happened to these persons after they completed their training.

Conclusions

DOD is experiencing a recruiting challenge that has called for an extraordinary increase in the attention and the resources focused on this area. As the services have reacted to this challenge, however, they have not had the time to carefully determine which of their improvement efforts are most effective and how their efforts affect the other services' recruitments. As a result, DOD has been unable to determine the extent to which the services are simply competing against each other and unnecessarily raising the cost of recruiting. Nor has it been able to suggest to the services the most cost-effective mix of their recruiting resources in today's market.

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[8] Section 581 of P.L. 106-65 (Oct. 5, 1999).

In the area of first-term attrition, DOD and the services also need more complete information on the root causes of attrition and on what initiatives work in the long term. At present, the services have no way to demonstrate whether or not the enlistees they are retaining in the short term by spending more time and resources are good long-term investments. That is, the services cannot yet demonstrate that these programs are not simply delaying the attrition of enlistees whom they help to graduate from basic training.

Recommendations

To maximize the effectiveness of DOD's recruiting efforts, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense and the service secretaries assess the relative success of their various recruiting strategies in meeting DOD's future needs. This assessment should address how one service's best practices might be applied to the other services, how the services can minimize competition with each other for the same limited number of enlistees, and how the services can create the most cost-effective mix of numbers of recruiters, amounts of enlistment bonuses, college incentives, advertising, and other recruiting tools.

Second, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the service secretaries to (1) continue to identify groups of enlistees whom they believe could be rehabilitated and retained, both during and after training, and (2) put in place tools for measuring the long-term success of these rehabilitative efforts. These measurement tools should allow the services to verify that attrition that is being reduced is not simply being delayed until later in enlistees' first terms. These measurement tools should also allow the services to determine what effect their recruitment of persons outside their traditional market has on attrition.

Agency Comments

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with our recommendations. Regarding our recommendation that DOD assess the relative success of various recruiting strategies, DOD believes that some competition among the services is healthy and productive but will consider using an outside contractor to measure the impact of this competition and explore ways to reduce duplicative efforts. DOD also indicated that it was looking at a variety of ways to expand recruiting efforts and plans to develop a new model that will allow tradeoff analyses to determine the relative cost-effectiveness of the various recruiting resources. We believe that it is important that this new model address the relative effectiveness of

alternative uses of recruiting dollars for such things as additional recruiters, advertising, and enlistment bonuses. Regarding our recommendation to take specific steps to reduce attrition rates, DOD agreed to target enlistees for rehabilitation or remedial training and to develop methods to measure accurately the success of such efforts in reducing first-term attrition.

Appendix I presents a detailed assessment of DOD's and the services' implementation of recommendations we have made in previous reports to improve recruiting and reduce attrition. Appendix II presents a more detailed description of our scope and methodology, and appendix III presents DOD's comments on our draft in their entirety.

We are sending copies of this report to the Honorable William S. Cohen, Secretary of Defense; the Honorable Louis Caldera, Secretary of the Army; the Honorable Richard J. Danzig, Secretary of the Navy; the Honorable F. Whitten Peters, Secretary of the Air Force; General James L. Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps; and the Honorable Jacob J. Lew, Director of the Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

Please contact me at (202) 512-5140 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Key contacts and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix IV.

Norman J. Rabkin
Director, National Security Preparedness Issues

DOD and Service Actions to Implement Our Recommendations

At the request of the Senate Committee on Armed Services' Subcommittee on Personnel, we have conducted a series of jobs to determine why the attrition of enlisted personnel during their first terms of duty has remained relatively constant despite the increased quality of new recruits and to analyze the management and selection of recruiters. Our work has included (1) a report outlining the reasons for attrition during the first 6 months of an enlistee's term,[1] (2) a report recommending how recruiter selection and incentive systems could be improved to increase recruiter performance and the likelihood that enlistees will complete their first terms,[2] (3) a study of reasons for enlisted attrition after basic training,[3] and (4) a study of the process of screening incoming recruits to detect criminal backgrounds.[4] In these four reports, we have made 20 recommendations on ways the Department of Defense (DOD) could improve its management of recruiter incentive systems, its process of screening incoming recruits, and its retention of first-term enlistees.[5]

In this follow-on work, the Subcommittee asked us to evaluate the progress DOD and the services have made in implementing our previous recommendations. In summary, we found that DOD and the services had fully, substantially, or partially implemented 17 of our 20 recommendations. One had not yet been implemented, but some action had been taken. And in two cases, DOD had taken no action. We judged the actions taken by DOD and the services using the following categories:

- **Fully implemented.** We used this category when we believed that the entire wording of the recommendation had been fully implemented.
- **Substantially implemented.** We used this category when we believed that DOD and the services had either taken actions that met the intent of

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[1] *Military Attrition: DOD Could Save Millions by Better Screening Enlisted Personnel* (GAO/NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997).

[2] *Military Recruiting: DOD Could Improve Its Recruiter Selection and Incentive Systems* (GAO/NSIAD-98-58, Jan. 30, 1998).

[3] *Military Attrition: Better Data, Coupled With Policy Changes, Could Help the Services Reduce Early Separations* (GAO/NSIAD-98-213, Sept. 15, 1998).

[4] *Military Recruiting: New Initiatives Could Improve Criminal History Screening* (GAO/NSIAD-99-53, Feb. 23, 1999).

[5] We withdrew a 21st recommendation, that the Secretary of Defense encourage the use of quarterly floating recruiting goals, because the services made compelling arguments against such goals.

our recommendation or some but not all of the services had fully
implemented the recommendation.

- **Partially implemented.** We categorized recommendations as "partially
implemented" when only a portion of the recommendation had been
implemented, when not all services had taken action in response to the
recommendation, or when progress in completing actions would take a
substantial amount of time.
- **Not implemented—action taken.** We classified recommendations as
"not implemented—action taken" when the services and DOD had taken
some action in response but the intent of our recommendation had not
been met.
- **Not implemented—no action taken.** We placed recommendations in
this category when DOD and the services had taken no action in
response to our recommendation and had no plans to do so.

Table 4: Status of DOD and Service Implementation of Our Previous Recommendations

Recommendation	GAO report and number	DOD response
1. Revise separation codes and issue implementing guidance to collect data on reasons for attrition.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997	Revised the codes and plans to issue implementing guidance telling the services how and when to apply these codes. Because the new codes and guidance have not yet been issued, it is too early to determine whether identified problems have been corrected.
2. Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force revise recruiter incentive systems to reward for recruits' graduation from basic training.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997, and NSIAD-98-58, Jan. 30, 1998	
3. Require military applicants to provide the names of their medical insurers and providers to encourage more accurate reporting of past problems.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997	Fielded a new medical history form to collect information on applicants' past medical providers and insurers.
4. Revise medical history form to eliminate vague questions about applicants' past medical problems.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997	Fielded a new medical history form with more precisely worded questions on past problems.
5. Use DOD's medical database to determine whether new screening tests should be added.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997	Issued guidance to the services on how to capture medical information on applicants' specific diagnoses. The database is now being developed for future use.
6. Place responsibility for reviewing medical files outside MEPCOM[a] to remove possible conflict of interest.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997	Does not believe such an outside review is necessary. Believes that existing review by MEPCOM is sufficient.
7. Test all applicants for drugs at the MEPS[b] to reduce the numbers of enlistees separated for drugs during basic training.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997	
8. Encourage recruits to undergo physical training while awaiting active duty.	NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997	

Navy response	Marine Corps response	Army response	Air Force response	Status of implementation
				Partially implemented
At time of review, recruiters' incentives already tied to recruits' graduation from basic training.	Recruiters must replace each recruit who does not graduate from basic training.	Just revised incentive system. Recruiters are now awarded points when recruits graduate from basic training.	Recruiters' incentives are not tied to basic training graduation rates, but the rates are considered for award purposes.	Substantially implemented: Navy, Army, and Marine Corps– fully implemented; Air Force–partially implemented
				Substantially implemented
				Substantially implemented
				Partially implemented
				Not implemented—no action taken
Tests applicants for drugs at the MEPS and at basic training.	Tests for drugs at the MEPS and at basic training.	Tests for drugs at the MEPS.	Tests for drugs at the MEPS.	Fully implemented
Began an Advanced Paygrade Program that rewards enlistees with an E-2 rank for completing stated requirements, including physical training, while awaiting active duty. Recruits are now granted access to military fitness facilities.	All recruits are encouraged, but not required, to undergo physical training while awaiting active duty. Recruits are now granted access to military fitness facilities.	Initiated a program that offers enlistees the rank of E-2 after they complete a list of tasks, including physical training, while awaiting active duty. Recruits are now granted access to military fitness facilities.	Enlistees are encouraged, but not required, to conduct physical training while awaiting active duty. Recruits are now granted access to military fitness facilities.	Fully implemented

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Recommendation	GAO report and number	DOD response
9. Review policies allowing first-term enlistees to separate voluntarily more than 90 days before the end of their contractual obligations.	NSIAD-98-213, Sept. 15, 1998	
10. Use quality-of-life surveys to target improvements that will result in lower first-term attrition.	NSIAD-98-213, Sept. 15, 1998	In late 1999, administered a survey of active-duty personnel that included many items aimed at assessing quality of life. There is also a legislative mandate that the services administer an exit survey.
11. Leadership should continually emphasize the cost of attrition.	NSIAD-98-213, Sept. 15, 1998	In testimonies and other forums, DOD has made reducing attrition an important goal.
12. Target first-term enlistees for retention and remedial action.	NSIAD-98-213, Sept. 15, 1998	
13. Reassess the appropriateness of providing favorable types of discharge to enlistees whose behavior or performance led to their early separation.	NSIAD-98-213, Sept. 15, 1998	No action taken.

Navy response	Marine Corps response	Army response	Air Force response	Status of implementation
Has taken no action in response to this recommendation. Our data indicated that the Navy had the highest number of enlistees allowed early releases.	Has taken no action because few persons are allowed such early releases. Our work confirmed this is true for the Marine Corps.	Reviewed policies and made no changes. Our data indicated that the Army grants few enlistees early releases.	Reviewed policies and decreased number of early releases.	Partially implemented
Designing a survey to be given to personnel at "transition points," including when they separate or reenlist.	Using both exit and retention surveys. Awaiting analysis by Naval Postgraduate School. Used information from 1993 and 1998 quality-of-life surveys to make improvements in housing and leisure and recreation activities. These improvements have been targeted at all Marine Corps personnel, not just first-termers.	Administering entry and exit surveys to first-term enlistees to obtain information on root causes of attrition.	Has administered biannual surveys and will institute exit surveys beginning in April 2000 to use in addressing retention.	Partially implemented
Navy officials admit they cannot afford to weed out recruits. They have initiated many remedial programs to reduce attrition.	The July 1999 Marine Corps Commandant's Planning Guidance emphasized leadership responsibility for mentoring Marines and providing a framework for success.	The Army's philosophy has changed from "Prove to us you're good enough to be in our Army and we'll let you in" to "It's going to be tough, but we will train you. We will get you through it."	Three times a year, commanders of the recruiting, basic training, and technical commands meet to discuss issues including reducing attrition.	Fully implemented
Instituted six remedial programs targeting enlistees in basic training. These programs are aimed at enlistees having problems with academics, adjustment, behavior, and physical training. Plans to provide more remedial attention to enlistees in the fleet who are having minor disciplinary problems and experiencing hardships.	Began new programs in basic training to target persons threatening suicide and suffering physical problems such as lower extremity injuries. No remedial programs aimed at targeting persons after training.	Ft. Jackson, the Army's largest basic training site, has developed programs designed to remediate enlistees experiencing problems with injuries and with adjustment, language, physical fitness, behavioral, and academic problems. After training, plans to target enlistees who have previously been separated for desertion or minor disciplinary problems.	Targeted for special attention persons with physical injuries and psychological problems in basic training and enlistees who make false declarations of homosexuality. After training, providing remedial attention to enlistees with minor disciplinary problems.	Substantially implemented
				Not implemented—no action taken

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Recommendation	GAO report and number	DOD response
14. Use recruiters to select recruiters.	NSIAD-98-58, Jan. 30, 1998	
15. Explore the feasibility of developing or procuring assessment tests that can aid in the selection of recruiters.	NSIAD-98-58, Jan. 30, 1998	
16. Have drill instructors and recruiters interact.	NSIAD-98-58, Jan. 30, 1998	
17. Give recruits a physical fitness test before they go to basic training.	NSIAD-98-58, Jan. 30, 1998	
18. Develop a DOD plan to use initiatives to electronically transmit the background check forms and fingerprints.	NSIAD-99-53, Feb. 23, 1999	Has developed a timeline for the services to electronically transmit background check forms and fingerprints.

Navy response	Marine Corps response	Army response	Air Force response	Status of implementation
Has five-member recruiter selection teams comprising career recruiters who visit units to screen personnel for recruiting duty.	Uses experienced recruiters to help select recruiters.	Has a four-member recruit the recruiter team that visits installations to select potential recruiters. Some, but not all, recruiters are selected by this team.	Uses experienced recruiters to help select recruiters.	Fully implemented
Has begun to test the Emotional Quotient Inventory in selecting recruiters.	Does not support assessment tests for recruiters. Relies on commanders'recommendations and personal interviews to select recruiters.	Administers the Emotional Quotient Inventory to potential recruiters but will not use it to screen people out of recruiting until it has been validated. Also used a Prevue Assessment instrument to predict the potential success of persons for recruiting duty.	Uses the Emotional Quotient Inventory, in conjunction with personal interviews, to select recruiters.	Substantially implemented
Requires its recruiters to attend Recruiter Refresher Training program at its basic training camp.	Recruiters and drill instructors continually interact, both formally and informally. Drill instructors provide feedback to recruiters on their recruits' performance in training.	Too dispersed to require formal and regular interaction between drill instructors and recruiters. There are too many locations for recruiters to keep track of recruits.	Interaction between drill instructors and recruiters is generally limited to one-time recruiter visits to basic training to talk with trainees.	Substantially implemented
Has a voluntary physical fitness test as part of its Advanced Paygrade System.	Gives an initial strength test to recruits before they are sent to basic training.	Has a voluntary physical fitness test as part of an incentive program for enlistees to achieve an advanced paygrade before they are sent to basic training.	Does not and does not intend to administer fitness tests, as it does not see fitness as a major problem.	Substantially implemented
Uses an electronic form to transmit background check forms directly to the DSS.[c]	Does not yet have the capability to send background check forms electronically.	Met DOD's target date for transmitting background forms electronically. However, DSS backlogs require that most forms continue to be transmitted manually.	Transmits all background forms electronically to DSS.	Partially implemented

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Recommendation	GAO report and number	DOD response
19. Require that all national agency checks for enlistment be based on full fingerprint searches.	NSIAD-99-53, Feb. 23, 1999	Plans to purchase automatic fingerprint machines for all 65 MEPS by the end of 2000. These machines will enable DOD to do full fingerprint searches quickly.
20. Do not assign enlistees to their first-duty stations until their background checks are complete.	NSIAD-99-53, Feb. 23, 1999	

Note: Gray shading in the table indicates areas in which either DOD or the services have no responsibility for implementing the recommendation.

^aMEPCOM = Military Entrance Processing Command.

^bMEPS = Military Entrance Processing Station.

^cDSS = Defense Security Service.

Navy response	Marine Corps response	Army response	Air Force response	Status of implementation
Will have all applicants undergo full fingerprint searches even before automated fingerprint machines are installed at the MEPS.	Will require that all enlistees undergo full fingerprint searches as soon as the automated fingerprint machines are installed at the MEPS.	Plans to require all enlistees to undergo full fingerprint searches as soon as the automated fingerprint machines are installed at the MEPS.	Will require full fingerprint searches of all enlistees even before the automated fingerprint machines are installed at the MEPS.	Partially implemented
Does not hold enlistees until their checks are complete because it takes more than 140 days for DSS to complete the checks.	Does not hold enlistees until background checks are completed.	Does not hold enlistees until their background checks are completed because of the DSS backlog. Interviews each recruit whose check has not been completed before she/he may proceed to basic training.	Does not hold enlistees until their background checks are completed because of the need to fill monthly classroom seats and meet enlistment goals.	Not implemented – action taken

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

DOD faces a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining the hundreds of thousands of new recruits it enlists each year. In response to the request of the former Chairman and the current Ranking Member, we assessed (1) the services' responses to recent recruiting shortfalls and their long-term effects and (2) the services' efforts to reduce their historically high first-term enlisted attrition rates.

To determine what the services were doing to meet their recruiting needs, we interviewed officials at each of the services' recruiting commands: the Army Recruiting Command, Fort Knox, Kentucky; the Marine Corps Recruiting Command, Quantico, Virginia; the Navy Recruiting Command, Millington, Tennessee; and the Air Force Recruiting Service, Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. We also reviewed past research on the effectiveness of various approaches to recruiting.

To determine what the services have been doing to reduce attrition during basic training, we visited one of each service's basic training sites: Army Basic Training, Fort Jackson, South Carolina; Navy Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Illinois; Marine Corps Basic Training, Parris Island, South Carolina; and Air Force Basic Training, Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. We interviewed officials responsible for implementing attrition-reduction initiatives and reviewed documentation on the effectiveness of these efforts.

To determine whether service efforts to reduce first-term enlisted attrition have been successful, we updated our previously reported attrition data by adding information on the most recent group of enlistees for whom the Defense Manpower Data Center had data 4 years after entry into the service. This group involved all enlistees who entered the services with no prior service in fiscal year 1995 and were separated before the end of 1999. We compared the attrition rates of this group to attrition rates for enlistees who entered the services in earlier years. Although we did not extensively test the reliability of the Center's database, we did compare attrition rates using this data to the attrition rates the services calculate themselves. While the services collect and maintain attrition data differently, their rates of attrition revealed the same trends and patterns.

To determine what DOD is doing to improve the data on reasons for early attrition, we interviewed officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Force Management Policy, Washington, D.C.; from the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command, in North Chicago, Illinois; and from the Walter Reed Institute of Research, Washington, D.C. We also

reviewed revisions made to the separations codes that are used to classify enlistees' discharges.

We conducted our review between August 1999 and June 2000 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Comments From the Department of Defense

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-4000

FORCE MANAGEMENT
POLICY

MAY 30 2000

Mr. Norman J. Rabkin
Director, National Security Preparedness Issues
National Security and International Affairs Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Rabkin:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "MILITARY PERSONNEL: Services Need to Evaluate Efforts to Meet Recruiting Goals and Cut First-Term Attrition," dated May 1, 2000 (GAO Code 702023/OSD Case 1989).

The Department fully supports Service efforts to obtain sufficient numbers of men and women to meet recruiting goals. Despite significant increases in recruiting resources over the past several years, the sustained robust economy and strong draw of post-secondary educational opportunities continue to present tough challenges to Service recruiters. While we have the greatest confidence in the readiness of the Armed Forces, our concern for the long-term success of Service recruiting missions and their obvious impact on readiness warrants continued close scrutiny of developments in this area.

We will ask the Services to continue their recently expanded recruiting efforts into new markets and new initiatives to increase production, the final effects of which will not be known for some time. The Department will consider using an outside agency to measure the impact of competition between the Service recruiting commands. In addition, we will develop a Joint-Service model that would allow trade-off analyses to determine the relative cost-effectiveness of the various recruiting resources. The Department also will continue to provide the Services with timely recommendations on recruiting resource allocations derived from existing proven models.

The Department will continue to work with the Services to identify the causes of costly first-term attrition. We recognize that, although the Services have made progress in this area, increased analyses and emphasis may yield further reduced first-term attrition, recruit replacement cost savings, and ultimately, relief in the form of reduced recruiting goals.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide the enclosed comments on the draft report and looks forward to working with you to identify and implement strategies to increase the probability for recruiting success and ease the burden on Service recruiters.

Sincerely,

Alphonso Maldon, Jr.

Attachment:
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT - DATED May 1, 2000
GAO CODE 702023/OSD CASE 1989

"MILITARY PERSONNEL: SERVICES NEED TO EVALUATE EFFORTS TO MEET
RECRUITING GOALS AND CUT FIRST-TERM ATTRITION"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense and the Service
Secretaries assess the relative success of their various recruiting strategies in meeting DoD's
future needs. This assessment should address how the Services can minimize competition with
each other for the same limited number of enlistees and how the Services can spend their
recruiting resources most effectively. (p. 35/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Concur.

The Department believes that, as in any corporate business, a certain level of competition is
healthy and productive. We also find that through competition and innovation, the Services have
opened new sources of recruits (e.g., former college students) in the marketplace and are not
always in "competition with each other for the same limited number of enlistees." However, the
Department will consider using the services of an outside contractor to measure the impact of the
perceived competition factor between Service recruiting commands and explore ways to reduce
duplicative efforts.

The Services recently have implemented test programs to increase the numbers of recruits
outside the traditional high school market to include individuals who have interrupted their
attendance in college and those persons who for a variety of reasons may not have completed a
traditional course of high school study. The Department, in partnership with the Services, also
has initiated re-engineering and privatization efforts to increase awareness of military
opportunities and to create new markets using the latest World Wide Web technology.

The Services routinely evaluate the effectiveness of their recruiting resource allocation guided by
the Department's cost-performance trade-off models. The Department intends to develop an
additional Joint-Service model that would allow trade-off analyses to determine the relative cost-
effectiveness of the various recruiting resources. Thus, if the Army increased funding for
advertising by 10 percent, the model would estimate the effects of that increase on recruiting
productivity across all Services. The Department will continue to provide the Services this
leadership along with timely recommendations on recruiting resource allocations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the
Secretaries of the Military Departments to (1) continue to target groups of enlistees whom they
believe could be rehabilitated and retained, both during and after training, and (2) put in place
tools for measuring the long-term success of these rehabilitative efforts. These measurement
tools should allow the Services to verify that attrition that is being reduced is not simply being
delayed until later in the enlistees' first terms. These measurement tools should also allow the

Services to determine what effect their recruitment of persons outside their traditional market has on attrition. (p. 35/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Concur.

The Department will request that the Secretaries of the Military Departments target recruits in initial entry training, who are identified for separation and whom they believe may be rehabilitated, and afford them remedial training opportunities in an effort to retain those individuals. Additionally, the Services will be asked to make available similar remedial training for Service members at risk for attrition during their first term of service and to develop methods to measure accurately the success of such remedial training in reducing first-term attrition.

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

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Acknowledgments

In addition to the name above, Beverly Schladt, Joan Slowitsky, Donna Rogers, Julia Kennon, and Nancy Ragsdale made key contributions to this report.

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